

- 513 When all had done, mattresses and eiderdowns would be brought and spread out on the floor for the half-dozen guests of honour, while the others made themselves as comfortable as they might with their overcoats and jackets. It was still considered rather indecent to undress, but before the lights were snuffed out the prudent ones would gather their arms and effects about them against the dangers and confusions of a night attack. In cold weather the fire was kept alight till morning; in summer the room would often become intolerably stuffy from the accumulated animal warmth of a score of snoring sleepers.
- 512 The Albanians were not given to early rising, for their evening hours were late, and in the mountains the mornings were cold. They would get up between eight and nine o'clock and, by a generous convention, the younger guests were left sleeping till last. The mountaineers knew not breakfast; but in many houses the host would bring a cup of coffee or of hot, sweetened milk when he saw us wake. Ablutions were perfunctory, each man, or the host, pouring cold water from a ewer over his fellow's hands, with which the latter seldom did more than dab his eyes. Moustaches were *de rigueur*, though by exception Abas Kupi was clean-shaven; but only priests or bandits grew beards. Shaving, however, was most often a weekly affair and considered a sufficient occasion to warrant the valedictory greeting of "*Meschnett*" — an equivalent of "God bless you" — to the shaver. In these matters I conformed to the customs of the country, but Maclean and Smiley insisted on adhering to the standards of cleanliness of their distinguished cavalry regiments. Stripped to the waist and with razors flashing, they washed daily and thoroughly, to the great wonder of the mountaineers who crowded round to watch. Albanian sanitary arrangements were primitive but ingenious. The closet, which adjoined the guest room, projected, sometimes precariously, from the house over the courtyard below. It consisted of a hole in the floor, often of impracticably narrow circumference; and, underneath it, the thrifty Albanians were wont to keep their poultry, which gobbled up a strange diet with evident relish.

1/2 [i.e. eating — Analyst]

342 monly used than at present. The shift from wheat to maize as staple cereal deprived the farmers in many parts of Albania of roofing material.

[353] The interiors of most houses are quite bare, with no carpets on the hewn plank floors, and little decoration on the walls. In the older houses a fireplace covers about 10 square feet of floor area, and the smoke finds its way out through the thatch or roof tiles. In so doing, it cures meats hung in a rack above the fire, particularly in Catholic houses where pork is preserved for the winter.

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The introduction of the *kulla* brought with it some drastic architectural innovations. The *kulla* is a 3-storied square tower, built with one purpose in mind—defense. Nopcsa finds a high correlation between the incidence of *kullas* in different villages and *bairaks*, and that of death by violence. The lower floor of the *kulla* is for the shelter of animals. The second and third are for habitation. One door opens into the stable below, a second, up a flight of bare steps, to the living quarters.

With a multi-storied structure something had to be done about smoke. Hence fireplaces were built one above the other, and a high chimney ensured draft. One of the principal troubles with the old-fashioned house was its lack of a toilet. The feuding Gheg, attending the needs of nature in a corn field of a frosty morning, made an excellent target to his enemies hiding in ambush, and the feudal code contained no sporting rules to outlaw this easy shot. The *kulla*-builders therefore constructed an overhanging enclosed balcony of masonry, to serve as "W. C." In the conflict between sanitation and safety, safety won. The drain hole is made crooked to prevent pot shots from below. Since there are few windows, and these are built more for gunplay than for light or ventilation, a strong draft usually rushes up the drain hole. Down below in a heap against the wall the refuse accumulates, and were it not for the healthy mountain climate and the hardihood of the mountaineers, epidemics would be commoner than they are.

Gheg houses have both a social and an economic implication. They are usually large, and accommodate an extended family and its animals. Serving for defense, they reflect the

low-pitched roof is tiled in red, with dormer-like smoke-holes, or tall, lidded chimneys. The strong wooden doors are round or square at the top; the doorways often formed by lintels and side-pieces of wood, or arched with stone. Windows are few, and very small, often mere loopholes or slits a few inches across. Glass is rare: the openings may be barred by twisted twigs. In the stone houses they are often outlined by a frame of regularly shaped and spaced blocks. The guest-room is lighted by rather larger windows, which are nowadays generally glazed, though old-fashioned paper windows still linger in some parts. The side of the house facing the road is blind, though sometimes a few narrow slits are pierced just under the eaves.

The peasants themselves give as a reason for building such fortress-like houses that they have lived so long in dread of hereditary enemies, often very numerous because of the constant blood-feuds. These, like feuds, in all countries, often arose over a woman, a runaway or a stolen wife. They said to me frankly: "Under Turkey we could pursue our wives, and kill them with their lovers; but now we are forbidden to do this. A slit is wide enough for us to shoot through, not wide enough for us to be shot at. No enemy can see into the house through it, let alone climb in by it. And then a woman cannot go out by it to keep a tryst, nor can a man come in to find her." For similar reasons, all these dwellings have inside sanitation—small apse-like closets built of the same material as the house, and apparently clinging to it.

The ground floor contains the small dark kitchens where the women and children eat their meals. They have floors of hard earth, and fireplaces of the huge projecting kind, or small open fires with smoke-holes above, with a few cooking-vessels of baked clay set at their edges: the flour-chest stands behind the door. On either side are the storerooms. An open-fronted shed holds the carts and ploughs, with the stables and barn not far off. The stable is lofty, its roof of bare rafters being continuous with the roof of the first floor, so that one may look down on the horses through the slits in the end rooms of this storey.

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Villages & Houses

515 Pazar I have seen peasants lie for long periods soaking an affected limb in outlying sulphur pools in the fields, and resting afterwards in booths of branches made by themselves.

In villages it is still usual when washing in the morning for one person to pour water over another's hands, passing the soap and towel as required. The face is afterwards washed with the hands. This may take place out-of-doors, or in the verandah-living-room. Before and after meals everyone washes his hands in the same way. Peasants usually have a bath once a week, using the washing-trough for this purpose, generally in the kitchen or a shed. They also change all their clothing once a week, as a rule, even [296] their thick woollen outer garments. These are all washed, so that they do not smell like a crowd of ordinary workmen, who may wash themselves more, but not their outer garments.

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S 514 Sanitation is of course very primitive in the villages. Sometimes the peasants disappear into the fields or up the mountains, though the countryside is remarkably free from refuse. Paper is rarely used, leaves or maize sheaths sometimes, or even a stone; and defecation is accomplished in the natural squatting position. In some cottages the midden or the cowshed serves. Other houses have a small shelter, made of boughs or wood, open to all the animals of the farmyard. Sometimes a small closet (*nužnik*), fenced half-way up, exists at the end of the passage on the first storey, with a triangular hole in the floor. In 'Metohija' the Albanians build a small apse-shaped room on the end of the house, on the upper storey—closed by a door, but again with a mere hole in the floor. Moslems place a jar of water by the hole. Enlightened householders are now prolonging their apse-closets by stone tunnels to the ground.

A [514] In the smaller towns a wooden shed in the garden is provided for the family. A triangular hole is cut in the boarded floor (sometimes also a smaller one is made for the children). Underneath is a pit (it may be ten feet deep), which is emptied when necessary: but sometimes, if space

342 types of housing may evolve by combining a two-room house to a prostylon house* (i.e. with a veranda). Starting from this idea, he proceeds to the explanation of how more elaborate housing types were created, such as those seen in the Scodra valley.

To illustrate this, Nopcsa gives the plan of the upper floor of a house in Kastrati (Fig. 71) and remarks that: «The plan of this house shows that it belongs to the same type as the Prel Ivanaj house we saw above (Fig. 68-69) and that the veranda is substituted

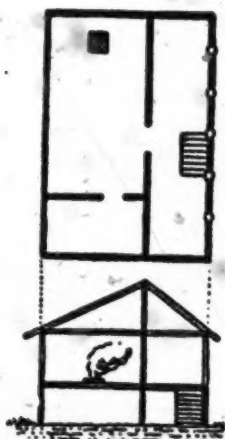


Fig. 70. Plan and section of a house in Vuksanlekaj (area of the Hoti tribe) (Nopcsa, fig. 28)

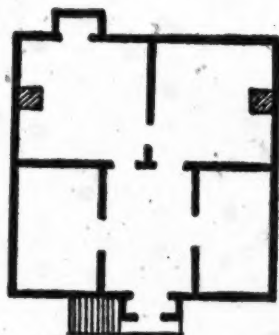


Fig. 71. Plan of a house in Kastrati (Nopcsa, fig. 30)

[712] by a space enclosed by walls». The staircase is also here external but, in order to protect the people, when they leave the house from the bullets of ambushing enemies, this staircase has been included into an enclosed entrance, which protrudes from the house in the form of a separate cabin outside its front wall. The small additional cabin at the back of the house includes the lavatory.

• [514] This enclosed entrance which, according to Nopcsa «constitutes an original Albanian construction», is shown on Fig. 72, picturing a house of Kolaj. This entrance also includes a passage which ends at an enclosed staircase. This house, with its four rooms, two in the front and two in the back, can be considered, according to Nopcsa,

prevent enemies from climbing it and from piercing a hole in it to fire on the defenders from above, something that has often happened. Finally, the lavatory is built inside the house. 342
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Just as the house of Scodra is the highest point in the evolution of Albanian house architecture, so is the Kula, according to Nopcsa, the most complete form of defensive houses.

The word Kula is of Arabic origin, and has already been met in Byzantine writers since the 11th century (!). Moreover it is also known by the Serbs as early as 1350. Consequently, no Turkish intervention for the construction of the Kula, it is said by Nopcsa, was ever required.

The particular scope determines the building material, plan, dimensions and other construction details of such houses. These buildings are high, towerlike, built of solid stone, providing the greatest possible cover. Narrow loopholes are opened instead of windows, and small towers are built in well selected defensive places.

A veranda and a Kula mutually exclude each other, because if conditions of security allow the building of a house with an open prostoön, same conditions would render the construction of a kula useless. And vice-versa, nobody would ever think of constructing such a type of dwelling, where there is a danger that a veranda might be burned down at night time. This is confirmed by the geographical expansion of the «shpi» (house) and the «kula» (fortified house). Thus, there is a complete absence of typical, towerlike «kulas» in Melcija Madhe, Zadrime, which is situated in a plain, as well as in Bregubuns and Bregumatja, areas that enjoy greater security. On the contrary, in areas where statistics of crime show that a 21-32% of all deaths are caused by murder, we find the kula, while houses with a prostoön are absent. Because of the custom of vengeance male members of many families are bound inside their kula for years. [682]
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As for the origin of these tower-form houses which, according to Nopcsa, were multiplied in Middle Albania between the years 890 and 1274, Haberlandt believes that from a house-building point of view, they must be derived from the towers and donjons propagated [177]
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1) Anna Komnini, 2, 124 Bonn: Τὴν μέντοι ἀκρόπολιν, ὅπου κούλα τῶν ἡ συνήθεια καλεῖται κούλα, ἐν ἧς καὶ κατοικοῦντο... (The acropolis, which is now by habit called kula, was occupied by Celts...) O. Kedrinos, 2, 366: Ὁ Βούρτζης ἰσχυρὰ λαβεῖν τὸ μέτρον ἐπὶ τῶν πρὸς δόσιν Ἀντιοχείας κούρων, Κάλου τοῦνομα... (Vourtzis had power enough as to take possession of a tower, called Kala, at the West of Antiocheia...)